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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CARTER URGES GREATER ECOWAS INVOLVEMENT
IN GUINEA

¶1. Ambassador Carter on July 17 urged the Representative of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Edward Aina to raise his organization's profile and play a leading role in promoting elections and good governance in Guinea. Citing the successes ECOWAS recently enjoyed in Togo and Mauritania, the Ambassador suggested that Aina work in closer collaboration with G-8 countries, and use his office to muster support among ECOWAS nations represented in Guinea. Noting that such involvement was clearly spelled out in the ECOWAS mandate, Ambassador Carter said Guinea is at a critical crossroads, and that ECOWAS involvement would demonstrate strong regional concerns for developments inside the country.

¶2. Ambassador Aina, a longtime Nigerian diplomat, said he was also concerned with the unraveling of the political situation in Guinea, but fell short of promising any specific initiative. He claimed that if he were to criticize Guinea's handling of elections or other issues "it would only sow confusion." He preferred such criticism to come from the organization's head office in Abuja.

¶3. Aware of the significant role ECOWAS played in 2007 when it dispatched former Nigerian president Ibrahim Babangida to press President Conte to reach a political compromise, Aina said that under the right circumstances ECOWAS could possibly ask Babangida to return. Unless the timing were opportune, however, Aina was unsure what the former president could accomplish, or even what his goal would be.

¶4. Ambassador Aina hopes to continue a regular dialogue with the US, and expressed concerned over recent trends in Guinea. After seeing President Conte earlier in the week at an official ceremony, Aina said the President is 'a sick man,' while the inner circle around him has dissolved into rival clans vying for opportunities to gain power. Civil society has fragmented, he continued, and political parties have no common approach on elections.

¶5. Aina affirmed that greater ECOWAS engagement was appropriate at this time, but said he would also like to see clear evidence that the Guineans are prepared to address their problems themselves and not rely on outside assistance. "You have to make at least some effort to lift your own luggage if you want people to give you a helping hand," he said.

CARTER